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FILE ONLY

BLAME BILL: Casey convenient scandal scapegoat

It now appears that if the rather messy Iran-Contra affair is tied up in a neat, pretty package after all, it will be laid at the clay feet of a perfect clay pigeon, William J. Casey, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

For those who have hated all the loose ends — the high-ranking military types who refused to testify about anything, the president who can't remember anything and the members of Congress whose lives would be less complicated if they didn't know the answers to such questions as, "What happened to all the private donations and proceeds from the arms sale that were supposed to go to the Contras?" — Casey is such a convenient out.

During his tenure as CIA chief, we often found ourselves in total disagreement with Casey, believing his attacks on the press, his schemes and his petty ways to be below the professional standards we might hope for from a person in such a highly sensitive national position.

We didn't find the sly-smirking Casey to be a very attractive person, but we certainly felt sympathy for the man and his family when it was learned that he was critically ill with a brain tumor and had to resign his post. At the same time, we also understood when one skeptic — Bob Woodward of the Washington Post — tried to sneak into Casey's hospital room to make sure the nation's top spook was indeed there . . . and indeed ailing.

Casey, before being hospitalized last year, flat out denied that he played any role in the Iran deal or that he knew anything about the funneling of money to the Contras. Now that Casey cannot pro-

test, it looks as if investigators will be able to blame just about everything on him.

Congressional probers and their staffs — Republican members, in fact — are telling reporters that it looks as if Casey influenced Lt. Col. Oliver North's role in the arms scandal, probably telling North that the president wanted him to assist the Contras.

Making Casey the dupe would conveniently clear North, who probers now say apparently was not really the renegade he's been pictured to be. According to this scenario, North was only a soldier following what he thought were the orders of his commander-in-chief. ("Jawohl, mein commandant!") It would also place our puzzled president in a better light.

"Casey's fingerprints are everywhere," one informant said.

And even Casey, the evil mastermind behind all the shenanigans, doesn't come off looking too evil. After all, he did have a brain tumor. . .

Excuse us for saying so, but all this sounds an awful lot like a Bill Casey "disinformation special."

At this rate, in a few more weeks we'll find out it wasn't Nixon who covered up the Watergate burglary and payoffs, it was Bill Casey. It wasn't Jimmy Swagart who brought about the downfall of TV evangelist Jim Bakker, it was Bill Casey. Before these intrepid investigators are done, it may turn out that Casey was Ivan the Terrible, Joseph Stalin and the iceberg that sank the Titanic.

You know, it's really too bad Woodward wasn't able to get into that guy's hospital room.